

BGA Strategy Day Notes

Notes from September 11, 2021

Present

- Toby Manning
- Mohammed Amin
- Peter Rootham-Smith
- Andrew Ambrose-Thurman
- Colin Williams
- Richard Wheeldon
- Stephen Tweedie

High-level goals

Goals for the strategy day

Goals for the day included:

- What is our purpose
- What do we offer members / non-members?
- What is our relationship with Clubs
- Understand our stakeholders
- Team building
- Potentially: How do we operate

Broadly this covers 3 areas:

- Goals/strategy
- How we operate
- Our culture
(Which feeds into “how we operate”: volunteer culture/empowerment takes real effort)

Goals for the organisation

We looked at BGA goals in two sections: a general, non-committing discussion to potential medium-term goals, and a detailed discussion of how to reflect this in our articles of constitution.

Possible 10-year goals:

We discussed a number of goals that we would like the BGA to work towards over the coming years:

Specific outcomes:

- Public awareness (people have much more awareness about chess)

- See more playing in schools
- 1000 members (~450 today)
- Growth in tournaments
- Players see themselves as BGA members and understand what that means
- Greater enthusiasm within the community
- British Congress recognised as UK premier tournament

Cultural goals:

- Inclusivity: do we address all strengths, empower volunteers etc.
- Seeing improved player strength (is this individual or BGA?)
- Community building (towards which we may take specific technical measures; eg. strategically we should consider whether we offer "hub" services/directories without too much regard for what are BGA events vs other UK community activities)

What is the purpose of the BGA?

Given those goals we visited in more detail the purpose of the BGA, particularly referencing the current constitution and the new articles of constitution for the intended Company Limited by Guarantee.

Background: the current constitution states that

"The objects of the BGA shall be to promote interest in and the playing of the game of Go, particularly in the UK the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands"

Beyond the general goals, we also need to understand specifically what our strategy is regarding clubs' responsibilities and activities vs. those of the BGA as a whole (and how we work together). Eg. should we be supporting clubs in outreach? What should we be providing in terms of advice, materials, policies and general encouragement?

We gave feedback on the new draft articles:

Action: Add: promote **awareness and** playing of go.

- Details: suggest: add "awareness", change "encourage" to "production" in article b): "Promote the awareness, study and playing of the game"
- and remove article d)? That now appears redundant

In order explicitly to cover increasing awareness of the game as a whole.

We considered whether we are succeeding against the current objectives:

- Governing body: Probably doing OK?
- Promotion of the game: No
- Promoting participation through specific events: Mixed
- misc.

How is BGA membership / playing population doing compared to other EGF countries? Stats from the last EGF AGM list the UK as the 4th largest active player population in Europe. The UK players per capita are in line with many other countries (not bad overall, but

notably only about half of France's.) We noted that active player count is a better metric than association membership: not all countries have national associations that players routinely join.

Note that the route to BGA membership needs considered: with the rise in online play, playing the game and joining the BGA via a traditional club is no longer the only, or main, way into the game

How might we measure successful growth in player numbers/activity?

- Number of BGA members
- Number of active UK players in the EGD
- Number of clubs
- Web site hits

Action: We noted that the new web site still maintains traffic logs but no longer uses google analytics (in order to avoid cookie popups). We referred this to the technical committee to see if we have sufficient metrics on web site hits to measure relative growth.

What should the BGA's role be in the future regarding maintenance of player grades?

- We are already the gatekeeper for tournament results entering the EGD, but it's not very visible.
(cf. tournament levy for non-members... this is significant because we pay EGF dues based on rated players, not BGA members)
- Can/should we make our role there stronger / more prominent?
 - Our role should be carrot, not stick, in this process

Why belong to the BGA?

BGA membership: benefits to individuals

What reasons do we believe players should have for joining the BGA?

Generally, memberships can offer:

- Private benefits: members benefit individually and directly from membership
- Public benefits: members support the organisation for altruistic reasons because they see the organisation as providing a benefit within the broader public

We need to take care that any private benefits offered do not undermine or restrict any existing public benefits.

Decision: We should improve communications around the benefits we offer today.

We don't necessarily need to set out a personal economic case for joining the BGA; membership may be supportive of our wider objectives.

Possible benefits of membership may include:

- Discounts on go equipment, online resources etc. (Eg. Go Juan? She already supports tournament prizes. Ai-sensei?)

- But this needs effort... where does it fall under? Marketing?
- And how might we prove membership to those offering discounts?
 - Could be via membership database but there may be GDPR concerns, and may be harder as we do not have formal membership numbers
 - We might host discount codes on a restricted members-only part of the web site (and we note that many other vendors employ similarly simple, low-security discount codes)
- We can recognise BGA members online in eg. any future discussion forum
 - OGS already offers similar recognition
- We should prioritise improved membership experience generally, especially around renewals
 - Under ownership of membership secretary and clubs&members committee
- What about online users?
 - Online tournaments: can we make BGA entrance free? (would reduce overhead; implications for running at a loss)
 - "Nearby player" contact lists?
 - We already have groups on OGS, KGS (need to make sure we know owners)

Action: We should investigate what organisations might be interested in offering our members discounts.

Colin will start with an initial outreach for possible discounts, and ask what verification they might want (implementing them will be a later step, not currently assigned.)

Action: We will solicit suggestions over email

Action: Andrew will make sure that the Membership Secretary is included in the Clubs and Members committee (cf. need to improve renewals processes etc)

Action: We will ensure we know the administrative owners of the existing online BGA groups (OGS and KGS).

BGA membership: benefits to clubs

Clubs/schools:

We covered a number of questions:

- Do we know who school club members are?
 - The youth committee maintains a list but it not synced with clubs committee, nor under that committee's remit
- What resources do we have for interested teachers etc.? And what physical on-site outreach can we do?
 - The easiest first step is the web site, making it easy to find/access and collating existing material, identifying and filling gaps

- We should make clearer the work of the BGA, and be actively reaching out to schools
- There should be a difference in message to schools and to kids
 - We should particularly highlight the advantages for teachers (eg. as a high-quality extra-curricular activity. This might be easier sell for public schools)
 - cf. chess: there are some paid-for chess clubs, providing useful after-school activity
- Generally, BGA is supporting the club, not necessarily getting anything back

We see the BGA's roles as:

- Providing supporting material
- Making connections/providing local contacts
- Promoting/awareness
- Probably **not** actually organising groups
 - Rather, supporting groups organically. We have a **bottom-up strategy**.

Clubs generally

Andrew's presentation. [Summary of research work into understanding and supporting volunteers in the BGA]

Some discussion on Andrew's presentation:

- Members returned split opinions.... do we know what clubs are actually doing, and where we can make a difference?
- Clubs can have a role in contact-making, but the BGA can help. Not just one-off... there may be longer-term relationships. Eg. in facilitating stronger players visiting clubs for teaching games/reviews
 - But should this be for affiliated clubs only (our feeling was probably not... what is affiliation even for? We'll come back to that question.)
- Suggestions from clubs:
 - Interest in facilitating inter-club tournaments
 - League has petered out. Can we do a ladder? That still has problems but might be more robust against non-participation (a league has problems if needed matches simply don't occur, but movement in a ladder can still occur between active participants or via forfeits from inactive ones.)
- Can we get the people running the clubs in the same room to facilitate conversations?
 - Eg. Club session at Congress/tournaments?
 - Conferences have a "BoF" format: "Birds of a Feather" sessions, typically informal 30 minute sessions between the main event and dinner. A combined clubs and volunteers BoF might be useful at a major tournament.
- BGA can help building contacts between clubs and clubs/individuals
 - There may be issues around availability/visibility of club membership
 - GDPR, let's make sure that that is not getting in the way

- Have some data about individual club memberships in the tournament results that might help
- We need to promote what we already do
 - Better communications, better organisation of existing web site material

Action: Andrew will collate what web site support material we already have and email this to club contacts

Action: We will include a relevant writeup in the BGJ and ask clubs to update their BGA contacts

Action: We will delegate appropriate web-site edit rights Andrew to help him collect and organise material for clubs

- BGA Insurance policy
 - There are split opinions on its value
 - We need better clarity on what is covered and implications for affiliation

Action: Richard will share the policy details with Amin, who will review its contents

- Adhering to BGA policies
 - Our message should emphasise that we want to help clubs adhere to existing legal requirements where necessary (safeguarding, equality etc); we are not trying to impose additional requirements on clubs
- "Affiliation":
 - It is unclear exactly what advantages formal "affiliation" of a club with the BGA may be. It may be linked to insurance and we need to clarify use of this language in our insurance policies.
 - There is some mixed messaging about the intent of affiliation, which needs clarification
 - Generally, we don't like 2-tier affiliation which prefers some clubs over others; desire is to simplify, reduce the burden of obligations on clubs, but still to have well-defined ways of working together with clubs that might have specific requirements (a-la-carte relationship; eg. obligations on tournament organisers if, and only if, they want to work with us for specific reasons such as insurance coverage, board hire or EGD results)
- We do still need to know what clubs are known ("registered?") to the BGA, "affiliation" has been a useful generic term for this in the past

BGA membership: Benefits to non-members

We considered specific groups of non-members that we may want to work with/for:

Young people.

- Is there research on advantages of playing Go for young players? For schools outreach (eg. we know of a baduk unit at a Korean university.)
- We might consider articles in eg. Time Educational Supplement?

[We revisited this topic in more detail later on in our discussions on outreach.]

Online:

- The Club handbook does not cover this, and (especially after lockdown) there is much we could share around organising play online

Action: The handbook needs a rewrite; Toby and Andrew will lead this. We may want to ask clubs for their input too.

- Now and in the future, Club activities are naturally going to cover a spectrum between face-to-face and online. The BGA should treat online clubs no differently in principle.

EGC

Hosting the European Go Congress seems to fit our 10-yr goals. We should aspire to host it by 2030.

- The next open slot is in 2025; there are widespread concerns about our capacity (especially manpower) to submit a bid that soon.
- Opportunities for funding include:
 - Our reserves
 - Individual player investments (was done for Coventry via equity invested into a dedicated Company Limited by Guarantee)

Alternative opportunities to host event include

- EGF Top Events eg. EGWC, rengo
 - We might not want to lose money on those
 - (European Youth might be an exception as youth activities are an opportunity for us to invest in the future)
- Student Championship
 - would need a serious focus on university engagement

Action: We recorded a desire to flesh out thoughts on a Student Championship, but did not go into detail on the day

- Should aspire to host the Youth and Students events before 2030
- There was no great desire to host rengo

Strategy on relationship with EGF

We resolved:

Decision: The BGA is broadly supportive of the goals of the EGF (eg. we continue to depend on the EGD for grading)

- We don't want to be victims of any EGF financial problems

Decision: We aim to work with the EGF and with other member countries to push back against excessive costs and to ensure value

- We noted that the UK (via Toby) is being invited to join a slack forum with other member countries
- We do not believe that EGF meetings are run efficiently, and proposed submitting an EGF motion to:
 - limit meetings to 4 hours;
 - Ensure timely opportunity to review submitted reports before the meeting.

We see opportunities to work with countries beyond the EGF (eg. recent invitations to participate in some Chinese events)

- These are probably not strategic, and we can continue to react to them ad-hoc as invitations arise

Outreach

Youth outreach: Clubs and Universities

What's the difference between general clubs and Universities?

- There is a distinct role for clubs run specifically **by** and **for** students
- It is easier to contact all Unis than all schools
- Continuity is harder — there is rarely any succession planning, and it needs continued recruitment to offset departing students
- Needs student participation (eg. entry to freshers' fair may be restricted to students)

Action: The clubs and memberships committee will look at what might be done specially for universities, eg for support or promotional activities.

Decision: Universities do not represent a different formal **type** of club per se, but they do have specific needs (cf. our a-la-carte club benefits discussion).

Youth outreach generally:

- Have had Deep Mind sponsorship (London Open, then again for youth)
 - We have used this for various activities but it's not always easy to spend it all
- Also have some budget for sponsorship from T.Mark Hall foundation
- We currently have no relationship with teachers' unions:
 - This may be a receptive audience for good-quality content
- The youth committee currently has 6 members, with good representation from outside council
- Much of the current youth effort is on supporting existing activities rather than growing

Action: We suggested writing Go articles for teachers' union journals. Toby will take this idea to the Youth committee.

Adult outreach:

- Demographics matter greatly in adult outreach (and there are more demographics than we can accommodate!)
- Specifically, older/retired people may have more time (both to play and to get involved)
 - We can enumerate the known health benefits of mind sports
 - There may be natural partners (age concern etc) and forums (Saga magazine etc.) for this demographic
- Adult outreach would match the current vacancy for a marketing secretary
 - (but there's no other obvious owner amongst existing activities)
- Parents are likely an explicit non-target (cf. the number of players we know who returned after taking a break from the game for family)

Decision: Older people and youth (via teachers) are our priority demographics for active outreach

- Other groups can still be reached via clubs and via passive channels (web site contacts etc., where the individual make the first effort to find us)
- It could be helpful to be able to contact individuals as they progress (youth->uni->club etc)
 - EGD pin may have value here
- What's the best value for money in outreach?
 - **Active** outreach, where we make an effort to reach new potential players;
 - **Passive** outreach, where we provide good quality information for potential players who look for us (eg. typically web site content)

Action: Our web site should prioritise being the landing page for new potential members/players.

While content for that may come from many groups, this work is in scope for the technical committee.

Decision: Overall web site [re]design (theme, layout etc.) is also in scope for this work

- Web content for passive outreach might include:
 - How to play
 - How to find a game
 - Pointers to other physical/online resources
- Navigation to other content that we provide to players and members is still important but can be secondary
- Can we get manpower for outreach work?

- Richard is willing to help but can't own
- Suggest BGJ advertising for a specific role in identifying targets for outreach material:
 - Looking for journals, magazines etc. willing to take a prewritten article promoting go

Action: We should add a regular (eg. 3 or 6-monthly) “How you can help” section to the BGJ, and will add a request there to help identify possible publication targets for outreach material

Action: To support volunteer recruitment/enablement, we will:

- Dedicate a forthcoming council session to the topic of volunteers
- Expand the meeting to include current non-council volunteers (eg. members of our committees)
- Present Andrew’s MBA presentation to start the session off

The council is particularly interested in improving how we handle newcomers to the game

- This will be helped by any improvements to the web site landing page for this purpose
- Other related issues are delegated to the clubs & membership committee

Finances

Account overview (Richard)

Richard took us through recent accounts. Discussions on that included:

- Tournaments:
 - Recorded tournament income is offset by tournament costs
 - Those costs include a pro-rated portion of the ongoing web site costs
 - Tournaments generally do not break even
 - Both tournament income and costs expected to be low this year
- Direct membership costs: this mainly covers the costs of our Go Journal and the EGF dues
- Youth:
 - We looked at support/sponsorship expenditure etc.
- Forecast is slightly down below breakeven going forward due to loss of sponsorships
- Other resources:
 - We noted that limited volunteer time is also a resource constraint, potentially as much or more so than finances
- Some subgroups (eg. the youth committee) have standing terms of reference that include an agreed budget
 - And we would like to continue and expand that model
 - We would like to see decisions on delegating spending authority (including potentially both spending targets and cutoff limits)

Decision: Committees can take a forecast budget to the treasurer (up to £500) or the overall council (for larger amounts) for pre-approval

- We may strip out web site costs from tournament costs in the accounts (it's largely historical)

Revisit the levy system:

We reviewed the current levy system for tournaments:

- The current levy is charged per person per day, dependent on a number of details including BGA membership, concession status;
 - Correct details are assumed via an honour system and are not verified or enforced
- The charge is made to the tournament director.
- Costs covered include insurance and EGD results reporting
- We do not make any additional charge for equipment hire
 - and nearly all tournaments use this, although LGC uses own equipment etc (it still uses our web site)
- We would like to more easily justify to members what the levy covers
- There may be opportunities to improve handling of levies by automating tournament registration
 - But tournaments see so many on-the-day entrances that this is hard to support in practice
- Our priorities should be:
 - Support tournament directors: simplifying the administration
 - Give BGA members a visible membership advantage
 - Though we should also explain what benefits we provide the community
 - Might consider having BGA logo on equipment as part of that visibility
 - Levies should depend on attendance, not purely borrowed equipment
 - That makes T.O. budgeting easier: equipment hire depends on maximum expected attendance, not on the actual attendance on the day

Action: We will ask John how much of the data used by the Levy system is already captured in our membership or other systems

Action: Richard will formulate a concrete proposal on a new Levy structure to take to council

Planning future budgets:

- We believe it is OK to draw down on reserves slightly for now (especially in the light of planned outreach activities that we hope will increase membership)
- Overall use of reserves:

- We acknowledged the existing decision not to invest those reserves in equities
- There are some concerns that there are a lot of potential changes in play: levy structure, IT investment, COVID impact on membership/tournaments. So it is not a bad thing to have a reserves buffer for the next few years

General conclusions

We ended with a review of our discussions against the initial goals for the day:

- **Benefits;** we still want visible benefits for members (tournaments, discounts), but not at the cost of wider aims / public benefits
- **Understanding our stakeholders:** The technical committee already has a number of possible survey questions to bring to members, what else should we be asking? (One larger survey is much better than a drip-feed of small requests)
 - (This is a topic for future discussion, no specific actions were recorded)
- **Team building:** We believe the event was successful for this, especially with the number of new council members
- **Strategic principles:** We have made progress and identified specific next actions
- **How do we operate:** we have targeted follow-up planned especially around areas of volunteer engagement

Andrew's MBA presentation:

We ended with just enough time to go through Andrew's presentation on his MBA thesis on the topic of BGA volunteering (as a preview of the planned expanded council session on that topic, not replacing that session.)

- The thesis has been already circulated with council but not all current members have received it

Action: Andrew will re-share the full thesis on the council list

- We expressed an interest in seeing any data on whether volunteers are coming back (or not) after lockdown